

Seoul Olympic Rings Include Some Made of Barbed Wire

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SEOUL, South Korea — Every airport has security checks for departing passengers. The one here even forces arriving visitors to walk through metal detectors after they leave the plane.

Outside the main terminal at Kimpo International Airport, soldiers carrying automatic rifles march in solemn lockstep past tourists searching for the taxi stand. In central Seoul, streets are awash in easily detected plainclothes police officers, who stand on street corners and at the entrances to underground passageways, all looking as if the last time they smiled was 1985.

Even at its most quiet, South Korea does not suffer from lax law enforce-

ment. But with only six months until the Sept. 17 opening of the Seoul Summer Olympics, security has become a national preoccupation.

Few days pass without a warning from one official or another that Communist North Korea will try to disrupt the Games through terrorism. Such polemics are not new. But they have assumed added significance after the destruction of a South Korean airliner as it flew over the Thailand-Burma border last Nov. 29.

Seoul, supported by key allies like the United States and Japan, blames North Korea for the plane's destruction, which killed 115 people. As proof, it produced a televised confession from a young woman captured a few days later, who said that she and a male accomplice had acted under instructions from North Korean leaders.

And now that North Korea's leaders

Continued on Page A33, Column 1

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Continued From Page A1

in Pyongyang say that their athletes will stay away from the Summer Games, the South worries that more violence may lie ahead.

"Some people feel that the threat is greater before the Olympics than during," said Kim Un Yong, vice president of the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee. That theory is based on an assumption that Pyongyang wants to scare participants away, but would be reluctant to act once its principal allies, the Soviet Union and China, are in Seoul running after medals.

Full Military Alert

The Games themselves are shaping up as the most heavily fortified sporting event in history.

South Korea's armed forces of 430,000 and its national police force of 120,000 are to be placed on full alert to protect the estimated 34,000 athletes, officials, journalists and technicians who will form the "Olympic family." More than 30,000 specially hired security guards are scheduled to be posted at the 34 competition sites and at dozens of training areas, hotels and other potential targets.

In addition, United States officials say that the 40,000 American soldiers stationed here will be on alert.

The Pentagon plans a full-scale show of military force, a reprise of deployments carried out during the Asian Games that took place in Seoul in September 1986.

Under this strategy, one aircraft carrier, and possibly two, will cruise off the South Korean coast, with each carrier having 6 to 10 escorting vessels. Surveillance by reconnaissance aircraft and intelligence satellites will be increased. Air Force planes may be flown in from Japan, and Marine amphibious battalions based on Okinawa are to be made available.

Special Watch on Airport

South Korean forces intend to watch Kimpo airport extra closely. As a precaution, athletes and other participants will be steered on arrival to a special terminal. Officials are still haunted by memories of 1986, when a bomb exploded at the airport, killing five people, just a week before the Asian Games opened. As usual, the South blamed the North, but no evidence has been produced.

At the Olympic Park, security will be equally intense. By official count, 117,000 gadgets — including television cameras, metal detectors and X-ray machines said to be able to detect plastic explosives — will be put into use.

The Athletes' Village, which is nearing completion, will be surrounded by three concentric fences, and a separate electrified fence will ring the entire Olympic Park. For good measure, police dogs will be used to sniff out explosives, and troops toting machine guns will patrol key locations.

Some officials wonder if they may be overdoing it. South Korean police officers and military men are not known for mild-mannered behavior. There is concern that the atmosphere could become oppressive by the time the Olympic flame is lighted.

To soften their image, the security forces recently began assigning women to Kimpo duty. True, the women smile a bit more than the

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men. But they are not conspicuously gentler, judging from the way they slam hand-held metal detectors against bodies.

161 Nations to Participate

South Korea is encouraged by the commitment of nearly every Communist nation to attend the Seoul Games, especially the Soviet Union and China. In all, a record 161 countries say they will come, the only exceptions being North Korea, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, the Seychelles and Albania, which habitually declines participation.

"The more nations that participate, the more that a terrorist country has to lose," said Hwang Kyu Wong, director general for security at the Olympic organizing committee. "Any country that might want to disrupt the Games must be isolated from the diplomatic community."

In Calgary, Alberta, a few weeks ago, the committee's president, Park Seh Jik, said Soviet and Chinese athletes might be asked to arrive a few weeks early to reduce the terrorist risk.

Still, more hawkish South Koreans insist that even a Soviet and Chinese presence may not be enough to deter Pyongyang if it feels cornered during Seoul's greatest public-relations coup. Skeptics include former President Chun Doo Hwan.

"North Korea will try to use all the instruments of violence in its arsenal," he told foreign reporters before stepping down in late February. "There is no evidence that they have changed their heart."

Security aside, Seoul has shifted into high gear now that its pre-Olympic day count has dipped below 200.

A Calmer Political Scene

South Korea's roiled political scene of last summer and autumn has entered a period of calm following the first genuine presidential elections since 1971. The new national leader, Roh Tae Woo, took office to little protest, and there is no reason to anticipate trouble, although in volatile South Korea one makes such statements at one's peril.

As ever, South Koreans view the Olympics as an affirmation of their arrival as a global economic force. Except for Mexico in 1968, theirs is the only developing nation to host the Games, and they have prepared with a vengeance.

All told, the country has invested \$3.1 billion over the last seven years, most of it going to speed up projects technically unrelated to the Games, such as new subway lines, an airport expansion and a cleanup of Seoul's Han River.

Some major Korean corporations, whose arms were blatantly twisted by the Government to become Olympics sponsors, are having doubts about whether they will get their money's worth in terms of future sales. But officials at the organizing committee remain bullish. They predict that earnings from television rights, special lotteries, licensing fees and the like will put them \$271 million in the black, a profit greater than that of the Los Angeles Games four years ago.

Rerhaps more significantly, South Korean officials want the Olympics to be a springboard for improved relations with China and the Soviet bloc, a significant shift in priorities for a fiercely anti-Communist government. Newspapers are filled almost every day with stories about South Korean trade opportunities with Eastern Europe and with Beijing. President Roh goes so far as to talk about establishing diplomatic ties with China during his five-year term.

Although that seems overly optimistic, it would be quite a coup for Seoul, given the fact that China fought side by side with North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War. Such a development would further isolate Pyongyang, officials here say.

Everything always comes back to North Korea in the end.

For the record, South Korea says it still wants the North to come.

Pyongyang has insisted on serving as an equal co-host to the Games. But the International Olympic Committee, with Seoul's concurrence, is willing to go no further than to have all or part of five events held in Northern territory: table tennis, archery, women's volleyball, soccer and cycling.

That's the final offer, the committee says, and it has set May 17 as its absolute deadline.

But "absolute deadlines" on this matter have come and gone before. Mr. Roh told an interviewer last month that he would leave the door open "until the eve of the opening ceremony."

But there is no sign that South Koreans would shed tears if — and more likely, when — North Korea stays home.